


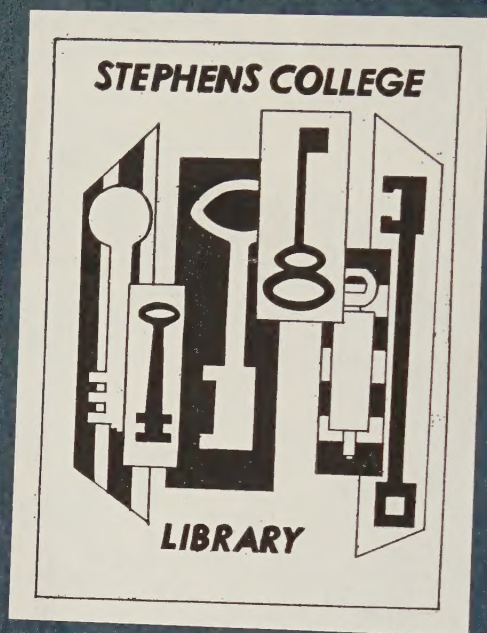
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THE BRITISH ACADEMY

THE ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

1914

# Hamlet and Orestes

A Study in Traditional Types

By

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## ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE, 1914

# HAMLET AND ORESTES

### A STUDY IN TRADITIONAL TYPES

By GILBERT MURRAY, LL.D., D.LITT.

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

#### I

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I am no Shakespearian scholar; and if I have ventured, at the invitation of the Academy, to accept the perilous honour of delivering its Annual Shakespeare Lecture in succession to lecturers, and in the presence of listeners, whose authority on this subject is far greater than mine, it is for a definite reason. In studying the general development of Tragedy, Greek, English, French and Mediaeval Latin, I have found myself haunted by a curious problem, difficult to state in exact terms and perhaps impossible to answer, which I should much like to lay before an audience such as this. It concerns the interaction of two elements in Literature, and especially in Drama, which is a very primitive and instinctive kind of literature: I mean the two elements of tradition and invention, or the unconscious and the conscious. The problem has been raised in three quite recent discussions: I mention them in chronological order. My own note on the *Ritual Forms in Greek Tragedy*, printed in Miss Harrison's *Themis*; Mr. F. M. Cornford's book on the *Origin of Attic Comedy*; and a course of lectures given at Oxford by Miss Spens of Lady Margaret Hall on *The Scapegoat in Tragedy*, which I hope to see published next year. I am not proposing to-night to argue in favour of the theories propounded in any of these treatises. I am rather considering, in one salient instance, a large question which seems to underlie them. As for my own tentative answer to the problem. I will only mention that it has received in private two criticisms. One friend has assured me that every one knew it before; another has observed that most learned men, sooner or later, 'go a litt

mad on some subject or other, and that I am just about the right age to begin.

My subject is the study of two great tragic characters, Hamlet and Orestes, regarded as Traditional Types. I do not compare play with play, but simply character with character, though in the course of the comparison I shall of course consider the situations in which my heroes are placed and the other persons with whom they are associated.

Orestes in Greek is very clearly a traditional character. He occurs in poem after poem, in tragedy after tragedy, varying slightly in each one but always true to type. He is, I think, the most central and typical tragic hero on the Greek stage; and he occurs in no less than seven of our extant tragedies—eight if we count the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, where he is an infant—whereas Oedipus, for instance, only comes in three and Agamemnon in four. I shall use all these seven plays as material: viz. Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*; Sophocles, *Electra*; and Euripides, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Andromache*. And before any of these plays was written Orestes was firmly fixed both in religious worship and in epic and lyric tradition.

As for Hamlet, I note in passing the well-known fragments of evidence which indicate the existence of a *Hamlet*-tragedy before the publication of Shakespeare's Second Quarto in 1604.

These are, counting backwards: a phrase in Dekker's *Satiromastix*, 1602, 'My name's Hamlet: Revenge!'

1598. Gabriel Harvey's remarks about Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The true date of this entry is disputed.

1596. Lodge, *Wit's Miserie and the World's Madness*: 'he looks as pale as the ghost which cried so miserally at the theator like an oysterwife, Hamlet, revenge.'

1594. Henslowe's Diary records a play called *Hamlet* as acted at Newington Butts Theatre on June 9.

The earliest reference seems to be in Nash's *Epistle* prefixed to Greene's *Menaphon*: it is dated 1589, but was perhaps printed in 1587. 'Yet English Seneca read by candle light yeeldes many good sentences, as Bloud is a beggar, and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frosty morning, he will affoord you whole Hamlets, I should say handfulls of tragicall speeches.'

The play of *Hamlet* is extant in three main forms:

The First Quarto, dated 1603 but perhaps printed in 1602. It is entitled '*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* by William Shake-speare, As it hath been at divers times acted



by his Highnesse servants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford and else-where'. It is much shorter than the *Hamlet* which we commonly read, having only 2,143 lines, many of them incomplete, as against the 3,891 of the Globe edition. It differs from our version also in the order of the scenes and to some extent in plot. For instance, the Queen's innocence of her husband's murder is made quite explicit: when she hears how it was wrought she exclaims:

But, as I have a soul, I swear by Heaven  
I never knew of this most horride murder;

and thereafter she acts confidentially with Hamlet and Horatio. Also some of the names are different: for Polonius we have Corambis, and for Reynaldo Montano.

The Second Quarto, dated 1604, describes itself as 'enlarged to almoste as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfecte coppie'.

Thirdly, there is the Folio of 1623. This omits a good deal that was in the Second Quarto, and contains some passages which are not in that edition but have their parallels in the First Quarto.

Thus *Hamlet*, like most of the great Elizabethan plays, presents itself to us as a whole that has been gradually built up, not as a single definitive creation made by one man in one effort. There was an old play called *Hamlet* extant about 1587, perhaps by Kyd or another. It was worked over and improved by Shakespeare; improved doubtless again and again in the course of its different productions. We can trace additions; we can even trace changes of mind or repentances, as when the Folio of 1623 goes back to a discarded passage in the First Quarto. It is a live and growing play; apt no doubt to be slightly different at each performance, and growing steadily more profound, more rich, and more varied in its appeal.

And before it was an English play, it was a Scandinavian story: a very ancient Northern tale, not invented by any one, but just living, and doubtless from time to time growing and decaying, in oral tradition. It is recorded at length, of course with some remodelling, both conscious and unconscious, by Saxo Grammaticus in his great *History of the Danes, Gesta Danorum*, Books III and IV. Saxo wrote about the year 1185; he calls his hero Amlethus, or Amlodi, prince of Jutland, and has worked in material that

seems to come from the classical story of Brutus—Brutus the Fool, who cast out the Tarquins—and the deeds of Anlaf Curan, king of Ireland. But the story of Hamlet existed long before Saxo; for the Prose Edda happens to quote a song by the poet Snaebjörn, composed about 980, with a reference to 'Amlodi'. And it must mean our Amlodi; for our Amlodi in his pretended madness was a great riddle-maker, and the song refers to one of his best riddles. He speaks in Saxo of the sand as meal ground by the sea; and Snaebjörn's song calls the sea 'Amlodi's meal-bin'.

Besides Saxo we have a later form of the same legend in the Icelandic *Ambales Saga*. The earliest extant manuscripts of this belong to the seventeenth century.

Thus our sources for Hamlet will be (1) the various versions of the play known to us, (2) the story in Saxo Grammaticus and the *Ambales Saga*, and (3) some occasional variants of these sagas.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Now to our comparison.

1. The general situation. In all the versions, both Northern and Greek, the hero is the son of a king who has been murdered and succeeded on the throne by a younger kinsman—a cousin, Aegisthus, in the Greek; a younger brother, Feng or Claudius, in the Northern. The dead king's wife has married his murderer. The hero, driven by supernatural commands, undertakes and carries through the duty of vengeance.

In Shakespeare the hero dies as his vengeance is accomplished; but this seems to be an innovation. In Saxo, *Ambales*, and the Greek he duly succeeds to the kingdom. In Saxo there is no mention of a ghost; the duty of vengeance is perhaps accepted as natural. In *Ambales*, however, there are angels; in the English, a ghost; in the Greek, dreams and visions of the dead father, and an oracle.

2. In all versions of the story there is some shyness about the mother-murder. In Saxo the mother is not slain; in Shakespeare she is slain by accident, not deliberately murdered; in *Ambales* she is warned and leaves the burning Hall just in time. In one of the variants the mother refuses to leave the Hall and is burnt

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, numerous variants and offshoots of the Hamlet story. See *Corpus Hamleticum* by Professor Josef Schick of Munich. Only vol. i. *Das Glückskind mit dem Todesbrief* (1912), seems to be out.



with her husband.<sup>1</sup> In the Greek versions she is deliberately slain, but the horror of the deed unseats the hero's reason. We shall consider this mother more at length later on.

3. In all the versions the hero is in some way under the shadow of madness. This is immensely important, indeed essential, in his whole dramatic character. It is present in all the versions, but is somewhat different in each.

In *Hamlet* the madness is assumed, but I trust I am safe in saying that there is something in the hero's character which at least makes one wonder if it is entirely assumed. I think the same may be said of Amlodi and Ambales.

In the Greek the complete madness only comes as a result of the mother-murder; yet here too there is that in the hero's character which makes it easy for him to go mad. In the *Choephoroi*, where we see him before the deed, he is not normal. His language is strange and broken amid its amazing eloquence; he is a haunted man. In other plays, after the deed, he is seldom actually raving. But, like Hamlet, in his mother's chamber he sees visions which others cannot:

You see them not: 'tis only I that see

(*Cho.* 1061, cf. *Or.* 255-79); he indulges freely in soliloquies (*I. T.* 77-94, *El.* 367-90; cf. *I. T.* 940-78; *Cho.* 268-305 and last scene); especially, like Hamlet, he is subject to paralysing doubts and hesitations, alternating with hot fits. For instance, once in the *Iphigenia* he suddenly wishes to fly and give up his whole enterprise and has to be checked by Pylades (*I. T.* 93-103):

O God, where hast thou brought me? what new snare  
Is this?—I slew my mother, I avenged  
My father at thy bidding. I have ranged  
A homeless world, hunted by shapes of pain. . . .  
. . . We still have time to fly for home,  
Back to the galley quick, ere worse things come.

PYLADES

To fly we dare not, brother: 'tis a thing  
Not of our custom.

Again, in the *Electra* he suspects that the God who commands him to take vengeance may be an evil spirit in disguise:

<sup>1</sup> Halfdan is killed by his brother Frodi, who also takes his wife. Halfdan's sons Helgi and Hroar eventually burn Frodi at a feast. See Professor Elton's appendix to his translation of Saxo, edited by York Powell.

How if some fiend of Hell  
 Hid in God's likeness spake that oracle?  
 (*El.* 979; cf. *Hamlet*, II. 2:

The spirit that I have seen  
 May be the devil).

At the moment before the actual crisis he is seized with horror and tries to hold back. In the *Choephori* this is given in a line or two: 'Pylades, what am I do? Let me spare my mother!'—or 'Shall I spare,' if we put a query at the end of the line (*Cho.* 899). In the *Electra* it is a whole scene, where he actually for the moment forgets what it is that he has to do; he only remembers that it has something to do with his mother.

The scene is so characteristic that I must quote several lines of it. Aegisthus has just been slain: Clytemnestra is seen approaching (*Electra*, 962-87).

ORESTES

What would we with our mother? . . . Didst thou say  
 Kill her? .

ELECTRA

What? Is it pity? . . . Dost thou fear  
 To see thy mother's shape?

ORESTES

"Twas she that bare  
 My body into life. She gave me suck.  
 How can I strike her?

ELECTRA

Strike her as she struck  
 Our father!

ORESTES (*to himself, brooding*)

Phoebus, God, was all thy mind  
 Turned unto darkness?

ELECTRA

If thy God be blind,  
 Shalt thou have light?

ORESTES (*as before*)

Thou, Thou, didst bid me kill  
 My mother: which is sin.

ELECTRA

How brings it ill  
 To thee, to raise our father from the dust?



## ORESTES

I was a clean man once. . . . Shall I be thrust  
From men's sight, blotted with her blood? . . .

Again he vows, too late, after the mother-murder, that his Father's Ghost, if it had known all, would never have urged him to such a deed: it would rather

have knelt down  
And hung his wreath of prayers about my beard,  
To leave him unavenged

(*Or.* 288-93). In Hamlet this belief is made a fact; the Ghost specially charges him not to kill Gertrude:

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy Mother aught

(*Hamlet*, I. 5; cf. also the tone in III. 4).

Is it too much to say that, in all these strangely characteristic speeches of Orestes, every line might have been spoken by Hamlet, and hardly a line by any other tragic character except those directly influenced by Orestes or Hamlet?

Now what do we find in the sagas? Both in *Saxo* and in *Ambales* the madness is assumed, entirely or mainly, but in its quality also it is utterly different. Hamlet in both sagas is not a highly wrought and sensitive man with his mind shaken by a terrible experience, he is simply a Fool, a gross Jester, covered with dirt and ashes, grinning and mowing and eating like a hog, spared by the murderer simply because he is too witless to be dangerous. The name 'Amlodi' itself means a fool. This side is emphasized most in *Ambales*, but it is clear enough in *Saxo* also and explains why he has combined his hero with the Fool Brutus. Hamlet is a Fool, though his folly is partly assumed and hides superhuman cunning.

4. The Fool. It is very remarkable that Shakespeare, who did such wonders in his idealized and half-mystic treatment of the real Fool, should also have made his greatest tragic hero out of a Fool transfigured. Let us spend a few moments on noticing the remains of the old Fool characteristics that subsist in the transfigured hero of the tragedies. For one thing, as has often been remarked, Hamlet's actual language is at times exactly that of the regular Shakespearian Fool: e.g. with Polonius in II. 2; just before the play in III. 2, and after. But apart from that, there are other significant elements.

(a) The Fool's Disguise. Amlodi and Brutus and Shakespeare's Hamlet feign madness; Orestes does not. Yet the element of disguise is very strong in Orestes. He is always disguising his feelings: he does so in the *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In two passages further, *Andromache* 980 and *I. T.* 956, he narrates how, in other circumstances, he had to disguise them:

I suffered in silence and made pretence not to see.

I suffered, Oh, I suffered; but as things drove me I endured.

This is like Shakespeare's Hamlet. It is also very like the saga Hamlet, who laughs in pretended idiocy to see his brother hanged.

Again, it is a marked feature of Orestes to be present in disguise, especially when he is supposed to be dead, and then at some crisis to reveal himself with startling effect. He is apt to be greeted by such words as 'Undreamed of phantom!' or 'Who is this risen from the dead?' (*Or.* 379, 385, 478 f.; *I.T.* 1361, cf. 1321; *Andr.* 884). He is present disguised and unknown in the *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*; he is in nearly every case supposed to be dead. In the *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra* he brings the funeral urn that is supposed to contain his own ashes; in the *Iphigenia* he interrupts his own funeral rites.

— No other character in Greek Tragedy behaves in this extraordinary way. But Saxo's Amlodi does. When Amlodi goes to England he is supposed to be dead, and his funeral feast is in progress, when he walks in, 'striking all men utterly aghast' (Saxo, 95).

In *Hamlet* there is surely a remnant of this motive, considerably softened. In Act V. 2, the Gravedigger scene, Hamlet has been present in disguise while the gravedigger and the public thought he was in England, and the King and his confidants must have believed him dead, as they do in Saxo. Then comes the Funeral—not his own but Ophelia's; he stays hidden for a time, and then springs out revealing himself: 'This is I, Hamlet the Dane!' The words seem like an echo of that cry that is so common in the Greek tragedies: 'Tis I, Orestes, Agamemnon's son!' (*Andr.* 884; *I. T.* 1361; cf. *Cho.* 212 ff.; *El.* 220; also the recognition scenes). And one is reminded, too, of the quotation from the pre-Shakespearean *Hamlet* in Dekker's *Satiromastix* of 1602: 'My name's Hamlet! Revenge!' I suspect that these



melodramatic appearances were perhaps more prominent in the tradition before Shakespeare.

(b) The Disorder of the Fool. This disguise motive has led us away from the Fool, though it is closely connected with him. Another curious element of the Fool that lingers on is his dirtiness and disorder in dress. Saxo says that Amlodi 'remained always in his mother's house, utterly listless and unclean, flinging himself on the ground and bespattering his person with foul dirt' (Saxo, 88). Ambales was worse; enough to say that he slept in his mother's room and 'ashes and filth reeked off him' (*Ambales*, pp. 73-5, 77). We remember Ophelia's description of Hamlet's coming to her chamber

his doublet all unbraced;  
No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered and down-gyvèd to the ankle,  
Pale as his shirt . . .

Similarly Orestes, at the beginning of the play that bears his name, is found with his sister, ghastly pale, with foam on his mouth, gouts of rheum in his eyes, his long hair matted with dirt and 'made wild with long unwashenness'. 'Poor curls, poor filthy face', his sister says to him (*Or.* 219-26). In the *Electra*, too, he is taken for a brigand (*El.* 219), which suggests some lack of neatness in dress; in the *I. T.* we hear of his foaming at the mouth and rolling on the ground (307 f.). In both plays, it is true, Orestes carries with him an air of princely birth, but so, no doubt, did Hamlet, whatever state his stockings were in.

(c) The Fool's Rudeness of Speech. Besides being dirty and talking in riddles the Fool was abusive and gross in his language. This is the case to some degree in Saxo, though no doubt the monk has softened Amlodi's words. It is much emphasized in Ambales. That hero's language is habitually outrageous, especially to women. This outrageousness of speech has clearly descended to Hamlet, in whom it seems to be definitely intended as a morbid trait. He is obsessed by revolting images. He does

like a whore unpack his heart in words  
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,

and he rages at himself because of it.

(d) The Fool on Women. Now the general style of Greek tragedy will not admit any gross language. So Orestes has lost this trait. But a trace of it perhaps remains. Both Orestes and Hamlet are given to expressing violently cynical opinions

about women (*Or.* 246-51, 566-72, 935-42). The *Orestes* bristles with parallels to the ravings of Hamlet's 'Get-thee-to-a-Nunnery' scene (*III.* 1). The hero is haunted by his 'most pernicious woman'. All women want to murder their husbands; it is only a question of time. Then they will fly in tears to their children, show their breasts and cry for sympathy. We may, perhaps, couple with these passages the famous speech (*Or.* 552 ff. based on Apollo's ruling in the *Eumenides*), where he denies any blood relationship with his mother; and the horrible mad line where he says he could never weary of killing evil women (*Or.* 1590).

Both heroes also tend—if I may use such an expression—to bully any woman they are left alone with. Amlodi in Saxo mishandles his foster-sister—though the passage is obscure—and utters violent reproaches to the Queen. (The scene is taken over by Shakespeare.) Ambales is habitually misbehaving in this way. Hamlet bullies Ophelia cruelly and 'speaks daggers' to the Queen. He never meets any other woman. Orestes is very surly to Iphigenia (*I. T.* 482 ff.); draws his sword on Electra in one play, and takes her for a devil in another (*El.* 220 ff.; *Or.* 264); holds his dagger at the throat of Hermione till she faints (*Or.* 1575 ff.); denounces, threatens, and kills Clytemnestra, and tries to kill Helen. There are not many tragic heroes with such an extreme anti-feminist record.

The above, I think, are all of them elements that go deep down into the character of the hero as a stage figure. I will now add some slighter and more external coincidences.

1. In both traditions the hero has been away from home when the main drama begins, Orestes in Phocis, Hamlet in Wittenberg. This point, as we shall see later, has some significance.

2. The hero in both traditions—and in both rather strangely—goes on a ship, is captured by enemies who want to kill him, but escapes. And as Hamlet has a sort of double escape, first from the King's treacherous letter, and next from the pirates, so Orestes in the *Iphigenia* escapes once from the Taurians who catch him on the shore, and again from the pursuers in the ship. Ambales has similar adventures at sea; and the original Amlodi seems to have had nautical connexions, since the sea was his meal-bin, and the ship's rudder his knife.<sup>1</sup>

3. Much more curious, and indeed extraordinary, is the following point, which occurs in Saxo, *Ambales*, and the Greek, but not

<sup>1</sup> See also a pamphlet *Grotta Söngv and the Orkney and Shetland Quern* by A. W. Johnston, 1912.



in Shakespeare. We have seen that the hero is always a good deal connected with the dead and graves and ghosts and funerals. Now in the sagas he on one occasion wins a great battle after a preliminary defeat by a somewhat ghastly stratagem. He picks up his dead—or his dead and wounded—and ties them upright to stakes and rocks, so that when his pursuers renew their attack they find themselves affronted by an army of dead men standing upright, and fly in dismay. Now in *Electra*, 680, Orestes prays to his Father:

Girt with thine own dead armies wake, Oh wake,

or, quite literally, ‘Come bringing every dead man as a fellow-fighter’. One would almost think here that there was some direct influence—of course with a misunderstanding. But the parallel may be a mere chance.

4. I would not lay much stress on the coincidence about the serpent. Clytemnestra dreams that she gives birth to a Serpent, which bites her breast. Orestes, hearing of it, accepts the omen: he will be the serpent. And at the last moment Clytemnestra so recognizes him:

Oh, God;

This is the serpent that I bore and suckled.

We are reminded of the Ghost’s words:

The serpent that did sting thy Father’s life  
Now wears his crown.

However, Shakespeare abounds in serpents, and I have found no trace of this serpent motive in the sagas (*Cho.* 527-50, 928; *Or.* 479; *Hamlet*, I. 5).

5. Nor yet would I make anything of the point that both Hamlet and Orestes on one occasion have the enemy in their power and put off killing him in order to provide a worse death afterwards. This is important in *Hamlet*, III. 3: ‘Now might I do it pat, now he is praying’, but only occurs as a slight incident in Sophocles’ *Electra*, 1491 ff., and may be due merely to the Greek rule of having no violent deaths on the stage. Nor is there much significance in the fact that in both traditions the hero has a scene in which he hears the details of his father’s death and bursts into uncontrollable grief (*Cho.* 430 ff.; *El.* 290; *Hamlet*, I. 5, ‘Oh, all you host of heaven’, &c.). Such a scene is in both cases almost unavoidable.

Let us now follow this Father for a little while. He was, perhaps naturally, a great warrior. He 'slew Troy's thousands'; he 'smote the sledded Polacks on the ice'. It is a particular reproach that the son of such a man should be so slow-tempered, 'peaking like John-a-dreams', and so chary of shedding blood (*El.* 245, 336 ff., 275 ff., 186 ff.). The old king was also generally idealized and made magnificent. He had some manly faults, yet 'He was a man, taking him all in all' . . . He was 'a king of kings' (*El.* 1066 ff.). A special contrast is drawn between him and his successor (*El.* 320 ff., 917, 1080):

It was so easy to be true. A King  
Was thine, not feebler, not in any thing  
Below Aegisthus; one whom Hellas chose  
Above all kings.

One might continue: 'Look on this picture and on this.'

We may also notice that the successor, besides the vices which are necessary, or at least desirable, in his position, is in both cases accused of drunkenness (*Hamlet*, I. 4; *El.* 326), which seems irrelevant and unusual.

Lastly, and more important, one of the greatest horrors about the Father's death in both traditions is that he died without the due religious observances. In the Greek tragedies, this lack of religious burial is almost the central horror of the whole story. Wherever it is mentioned it comes as something intolerable, maddening; it breaks Orestes down. A good instance is the scene in the *Choephoroi*, where Orestes and Electra are kneeling at their father's grave, awakening the dead and working their own passion to the murder point.

#### ELECTRA

Ah, pitiless one, my mother, mine enemy! With an enemy's burial didst thou bury him: thy King without his people, without dying rites; thine husband without a tear!

#### ORESTES

All, all, in dishonour thou tellest it, woe is me! And for that dishonouring she shall pay her punishment: by the will of the Gods, by the will of my hands: Oh, let me but slay, and then perish!

He is now ripe for the hearing of the last horror:

#### LEADER OF THE CHORUS

*His body was mangled to lay his ghost! There, learn it all . . .*



and the scene becomes hysterical (*Cho.* 435 ff.; cf. *Soph., El.* 443 ff.; *Eur., El.* 289, 323 ff.).

The atmosphere is quite different in the English. But the lack of dying rites remains and retains a strange dreadfulness:

Cut off even in the blossom of my sin,  
Unhouselled, disappointed, unannealed.

To turn to the other characters; in both the dramatic traditions the hero has a faithful friend and confidant, who also arrives from Phocis-Wittenberg, and advises him about his revenge. This friend, when the hero is threatened with death, wishes to die too (*Or.* 1069 ff.; *I. T.* 675 ff.), but is prevented by the hero and told to 'absent him from felicity awhile'. This motive is worked out more at length in the Greek than in the English.

Also the friendship between Orestes and Pylades is more intense than between Hamlet and Horatio; naturally, since devoted friendship plays always a greater part in antiquity. But Hamlet's words are strong:

Give me the man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, yea, in my heart of hearts;  
As I do thee.

I find no Pylades-Horatio in the sagas; though there is a brother to Hamlet, sometimes older and sometimes a twin, and in some of the variants, such as the stories of Helgi and Hroar, there are pairs of avengers, one of whom is mad or behaves like a madman.

Next comes a curious point. At first sight it seems as if all the Electra motive were lacking in the modern play, all the Ophelia-Polonius motive in the ancient. Yet I am not sure.

In all the ancient plays Orestes is closely connected with a strange couple, a young woman and a very old man. They are his sister Electra and her only true friend, an old and trusted servant of the dead King, who saved Orestes' life in childhood. This old man habitually addresses Electra as 'my daughter'—not merely as 'Child', *παῖς*, but really 'daughter', *θυγάτηρ* (*El.* 493, 563). She in return carefully avoids calling him 'Father'; that is to her a sacred name, and she will never use it lightly, at least in Euripides. But in Sophocles she says emphatically: 'Hail, Father. For it is as if in thee I saw my Father!' (*S. El.* 1361).

In the Elizabethan play this couple—if we may so beg the question—has been transformed. The sister is now the mistress, Ophelia; the old servant of the King—for so we must surely describe Polonius or Corambis—remains, but has become Ophelia's real father. And their relations to the hero are quite different.

The change is made more intelligible when we look at the sagas. There the young woman is not a sister but a foster-sister; like Electra she helps Amlodi, like Ophelia she is his mistress. The old servant of the King is not her father—so far like the Greek; but there the likeness stops. He spies on Amlodi in his mother's chamber and is killed for his pains, as in the English.

We may notice, further, that in all the Electra plays alike a peculiar effect is got from Orestes' first sight of his sister, either walking in a band of mourners or alone in mourning garb (*Cho.* 16; *S. El.* 80; *El.* 107 ff.). He takes her for a slave, and cries, 'Can that be the unhappy Electra?' A similar but stronger effect is reached in *Hamlet*, V. 1, when Hamlet, seeing an unknown funeral procession approach, gradually discovers whose it is and cries in horror: 'What, the fair Ophelia?'

Lastly, there is something peculiar, at any rate in the Northern Tradition—I will take the Greek later—about the hero's mother. Essentially it is this; she has married the murderer of her first husband and is in part implicated in the murder, and yet the tradition instinctively keeps her sympathetic. In our *Hamlet* she is startled to hear that her first husband was murdered, yet one does not feel clear that she is perfectly honest with herself. She did not know Claudius had poisoned him, but probably that was because she obstinately refused to put together things which she did know and which pointed towards that conclusion. At any rate, though she does not betray Hamlet, she sticks to Claudius and shares his doom. In the First Quarto she is more definitely innocent of the murder; when she learns of it she changes sides, protects Hamlet and acts in confidence with Horatio. In Saxo her attitude is as ambiguous as in the later *Hamlet*; she is friendly to Hamlet and does not betray him, yet does not turn against Feng either.

A wife who loves her husband and bears him children, and then is wedded to his slayer and equally loves him, and does it all in a natural and unemotional manner: somewhat unusual.

And one's surprise is a little increased to find that in Saxo Amlodi's wife, Hermutrude, does the same as his mother has done.



On Amlodi's death she marries his slayer, Wiglek. Again, there is an Irish king, historical to a great degree, who has got deeply entangled with the Hamlet story. His name is Anlaf Curan. Now his wife, Gormflaith, carried this practice so far that the chronicler comments on it. After Anlaf's defeat at Tara she marries his conqueror Malachy, and on Malachy's defeat marries Malachy's conqueror Brian. We will consider later the Greek parallels to this enigmatic lady. For the present we must admit that she is very unlike the Clytemnestra of Greek tragedy, whose motives are studied in every detail, who boldly hates her husband and murders him. There are traces in Homer of a far less passionate Clytemnestra.

### III

Now I hope I have not tried artificially to make a case or to press my facts too hard. But I think it will be conceded that the points of similarity, some fundamental and some perhaps superficial, between these two tragic heroes are rather extraordinary; and are made the more striking by the fact that Hamlet and Orestes are respectively the very greatest or most famous heroes of the world's two great ages of tragedy.

The points of similarity, we must notice, fall into two parts. There are first the broad similarities of situation between what we may call the original sagas on both sides; that is, the general story of Orestes and of Hamlet respectively. But secondly, there is something much more remarkable; when these sagas were worked up into tragedies, quite independently and on very different lines, by the great dramatists of Greece and England, not only do most of the old similarities remain, but a number of new similarities are developed. That is, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Shakespeare are strikingly similar in certain points which do not occur at all in Saxo or Ambales or the Greek epic. For instance, the hero's madness is the same in Shakespeare and Euripides, but is totally different from the madness in Saxo or Ambales.

What is the connexion? Did Shakespeare study these Greek tragedians directly? No, all critics seem to be agreed that he did not. And, if any one should suggest that he did, I have further objections to urge, which would, I think, make that hypothesis unserviceable. Of course it is likely enough that some of Shakespeare's university friends, who knew Greek, may have told him in conversation of various stories or scenes or effects in Greek plays. Miss Spens suggests the name of Marston. She

shows that he consciously imitated the Greek—for instance, in getting a special effect out of the absence of funeral rites—and probably had considerable influence on Shakespeare. This is a highly important line of inquiry. But such an explanation would not carry us very far with Shakespeare, and would be no help with Saxo.

Can it be indirect imitation through Seneca? No. Orestes only appears once in the whole of Seneca, and then he is a baby unable to speak (*Agamemnon*, 910-43). And in any case Saxo does not seem to have studied Seneca.

Will Scandinavian mercenaries at the Court of Byzantium help us? Or, simpler perhaps, will the Roman conquest of Britain? Both these channels were doubtless important in opening up a connexion between the North and the Mediterranean, and revealing to the Northmen the rich world of classical story. But neither explanation is at all adequate. It might possibly provide a bridge between the traditional Orestes and Saxo's Amlodi; but they are not in any pressing need of a bridge. It does not provide any bridge where it is chiefly wanted, between the Orestes of tragedy and Shakespeare's Hamlet.

There seems to have been, as far as our recorded history goes, no good chance of imitation, either direct or indirect. Are we thrown back, then, on a much broader and simpler though rather terrifying hypothesis, that the field of tragedy is by nature so limited that these similarities are inevitable? Certain situations and stories and characters—certain subjects, we may say, for shortness—are naturally tragic; these subjects are quite few in number, and, consequently, two poets or sets of poets trying to find or invent tragic subjects are pretty sure to fall into the same paths. I think there is some truth in this suggestion; and I shall make use of something like it later. But I do not think that in itself it is enough or nearly enough to explain such close and detailed and fundamental similarities as those we are considering. I feel as I look at these two traditions that there must be a connexion somewhere.

There is none within the limits of our historical record; but can there be any outside? There is none between the dramas, nor even directly between the sagas; but can there be some original connexion between the myths, or the primitive religious rituals, on which the dramas are ultimately based? And can it be that the ultimate similarities between Euripides and Shakespeare are simply due to the natural working out by playwrights of special



genius, of the dramatic type. It is latent in that original seed? If this is so, it will lead us to some interesting conclusions.

To begin with, then, can we discover the original myth out of which the Greek Orestes-saga has grown? (I do not deny the possible presence of a historical element also; but if history is there, there is certainly myth mixed up with it.) It contains two parts:

(1) Agamemnon, 'king of men', is dethroned and slain by a younger kinsman, who is helped by the Queen. (2) His successor, in turn, dreads and tries to destroy the next heir to the throne, who however comes home secretly and slays both him and the Queen.

The story falls into its place in a clearly marked group of Greek or pre-Greek legends. Let us recall the *primaeval* kings of the world in Hesiod.

First there was Ouranos and his wife Gaia; Ouranos lived in dread of his children and 'hid them away' till his son Kronos rose and cast him out, helped by the Queen-mother Gaia.

Then came King Kronos with his wife Rhea. He, too, feared his children and 'swallowed them', till his son Zeus rose and cast him out, helped by the Queen-mother Rhea.

Then thirdly . . . but the story cannot continue. For Zeus is still ruling and cannot have been cast out. But he was saved by a narrow margin. He was about to marry the Sea-maiden Thetis, when Prometheus warned him that, if he did so, the son of Thetis would be greater than he and cast him out from heaven. And, great as is my love for Thetis, I have little doubt that she would have been found helping her son in his criminal behaviour.

In the above cases the new usurper is represented as the son of the old King and Queen. Consequently the Queen-mother, though she helps him, does not marry him, as she does when he is merely a younger kinsman. But there is one great saga in which the marriage of mother and son has remained, quite unsoftened and unexpurgated. In Thebes King Laius and his wife Jocasta knew that their son would slay and dethrone his father. Laius orders the son's death, but he is saved by the Queen-mother, and, after slaying and dethroning his father, marries her. She is afterwards slain or dethroned with him, as Clytemnestra is with Aegisthus, and Gertrude with Claudius.

What is the common element in all these stories? You will doubtless have recognised it. It is the world-wide ritual story of

what we may call the Golden-Bough Kings. That ritual story is, as I have tried to show elsewhere, the fundamental conception that lies at the root of Greek tragedy; as it lies at the root of the traditional Mummers' Play which, though deeply degraded and vulgarized, is not quite dead yet in the countries of Northern Europe; as it lies at the root of so large a part of all the religions of mankind.

I must not encumber my argument by any long explanation of the Vegetation Kings or Year-daemons. But there are perhaps two points that we should remember, to save us from confusion later on. First, there are two early modes of reckoning: you can reckon by seasons or half-years, by summers and winters; or you can reckon with the whole year as your unit. On the first system a Summer-king or Vegetation-spirit is slain by Winter and rises from the dead in the Spring. On the second each Year-king comes first as a wintry slayer, weds the queen, grows proud and royal, and then is slain by the Avenger of his predecessor. These two conceptions cause some confusion in the myths, as they do in most forms of the Mummers' Play.

The second point to remember is that this death and vengeance was really enacted among our remote ancestors in terms of human bloodshed. The sacred king really had 'slain the slayer' and was doomed himself to be slain. The queen might either be taken on by her husband's slayer, or else slain with her husband. It is no pale myth or allegory that has so deeply dyed the first pages of human history. It is man's passionate desire for the food that will save him from starvation, his passionate memory of the streams of blood, willing and unwilling, that have been shed to keep him alive. But for all this subject I must refer you to the eloquent pages of Sir James Frazer.

Thus Orestes, the madman and king-slayer, takes his place beside Brutus the Fool, who expelled the Tarquins, and Amlodi the Fool, who burnt King Feng at his winter feast. The great Greek scholar Hermann Usener some years since, on quite another set of grounds, identified Orestes as a Winter God, a slayer of the summer.<sup>1</sup> He is the man of the cold mountains who slays annually the Red Neoptolemus at Delphi; he is the ally of death and the dead; he comes suddenly in the dark; he is mad and raging, like the winter god Maimaktes and the storms. In Athenian ritual, it seems, a cloak was actually woven for him in late Autumn, lest he should be too cold (Aristophanes, *Birds*, 712).

<sup>1</sup> *Heilige Handlung*, in the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 1904.



Thus he is quite unlike the various bright heroes who slay dragons of darkness; he finds his comrade in the Bitter Fool—may we say the bitter Amlodi?—of many Mummers' Plays, who is the Slayer of the Joyous King.

But can we talk thus of Hamlet-Amlodi? I mean, can we bring him into the region of myth, and myth of the same kind that we find in Greece? Here I am quite off my accustomed beat, and must speak with diffidence and under correction from my betters. But it seems beyond doubt, even to my most imperfect scrutiny of the material, that the same forms of myth and the same range of primitive religious conceptions are to be found in Scandinavia as in other Arian countries.

There are several wives in the Ynglinga saga who seem to belong to the Gaia-Rhea-Clytemnestra-Jocasta type. For instance, King Vanlandi was married to Drifa of Finland, and was killed by her in conjunction with their son Visburrr, who succeeded to the kingdom. (The slaying was done by witchcraft; but no injury could, I think, exculpate Visburrr.)

Visburrr in turn married the daughter of Aude the Wealthy. Like Agamemnon he was unfaithful to his wife, so she left him and sent her two sons to talk to him and duly, in the proper ritual manner, to burn him in his house. Just as the Hamlet of Saga burned King Feng, just as the actual northern villagers at their festival burned the Old Year.

Again, there are clear traces of kings who are sacrificed and are succeeded by their slayers. Most of the Yngling kings die in sacrificial ways. One is confessedly sacrificed to avert famine, one killed by a sacrificial bull, one falls off his horse in a temple and dies, one burns himself on a pyre at a festival. Another—like Ouranos and Kronos and the other child-swallowers—sacrifices one of his sons periodically in order to prolong his own life. I cite these cases merely to show that such ideas were apparently current in primitive Norse society as well as elsewhere. But the matter is really clinched by Saxo himself. He not only gives us the tale of Ole, King of the Beggars, who came in disguise, with one servant dressed as a woman, to King Thore's house, got himself hailed as king in mockery and then slew Thore and took the crown [254]. He definitely tells us, in a story about the Slavs, that 'By public law of the ancients the succession to the throne belonged to him who should slay the king' [277].

So that when we find that the Hamlet of Saga resembles Orestes so closely; when we find that he is the bitter fool and king

slayer; when especially we find that Hamlet's mother, whatever her name, Gerutha, Gertrude, or Amba, and Amlodi's mother and Ambales' mother, and the mother of divers variants of Hamlet, like Helgi and Hroar, and Hamlet's wife, and the wife of Anlaf Curan, who is partly identified with Hamlet, all alike play this strange part of wedding—if not helping—their husband's slayer and successor, we can hardly hesitate to draw the same sort of conclusion as would naturally follow in a Greek story. Hamlet is more deeply involved in this Clytemnestra-like atmosphere than any person I know of outside Hesiod. And one cannot fail to be reminded of Oedipus and Jocasta by the fact, which is itself of no value in the story but is preserved both in Saxo and the Ambales Saga, that Amlodi slept in his mother's chamber (Saxo, 88; *Ambales*, p. 119 *et ante*, ed. Gollancz).<sup>1</sup>

There is something strangely characteristic in the saga-treatment of this ancient King's Wife, a woman under the shadow of adultery, the shadow of incest, the shadow of murder, who is yet left in most of the stories a motherly and sympathetic character. Clytemnestra is an exception, and perhaps Gormflaith. But Gaia, Rhea, and even Jocasta, are all motherly and sympathetic. So is Gerutha, the wife of Ørvandil and the mother of Amleth, and Amba the mother of Ambales. And if Gerutha is the same as Groa, the usual wife of Ørvandil, 'Groa', says Professor Rydberg, 'was a tender person devoted to the members of her family.' The trait remains even in Shakespeare. 'Gertrude', says Professor Bradley, 'had a soft animal nature. . . . She loved to be happy like a sheep in the sun, and to do her justice she loved to see others happy, like more sheep in the sun.' Just the right character for our Mother Earth! For, of course, that is who she is. The Greek stories speak her name openly; Gaia and Rhea are confessed Earth-Mothers, Jocasta only a stage less so. One cannot apply moral disapproval to the annual re-mariages of Mother Earth. Nor yet possibly to the impersonal and compulsory marriages of the human queen in certain very primitive stages of society. But later on, when life has become more fully human, if once a poet or dramatist gets to thinking of the story, and tries to realize the position and feelings of this eternally traitorous wife, this eternally fostering and protecting mother, he cannot but feel in her that element of inward conflict which is the seed of great drama. She is torn between husband, lover,

<sup>1</sup> In the extant form of the Ambales Saga Amba's personal chastity is preserved by a miracle; such an exception approves the rule.



and son; and the avenging son, the mother-murderer, how is *he* torn?

English Tragedy has followed the son. Yet Gerutha, Amba, Gertrude, Hermintrude, Gormflaith, Gaia, Rhea, Jocasta—there is tragedy in all of them, and it is in the main the same tragedy. Why does the most tragic of all of them, Clytemnestra, stand out of the picture?

One can only surmise. For one thing, Clytemnestra, like Gertrude in some stories, has both the normal experiences of the primitive King's Wife. Married to the first king, she is taken on by the second and slain by the third; and both parts of her story are equally emphasized, which is not the case with the other heroines. Their deaths are generally softened or ignored. But, apart from this, I am inclined to lay most stress on the deliberate tragic art of Aeschylus. He received from the tradition a Clytemnestra not much more articulate than Gerutha; but it needed only a turn of the wrist to change her from a silent and passive figure to a woman seething with tragic passions. If Saxo had had a mind like Aeschylus, or if Shakespeare had made Gertrude his central figure instead of Hamlet, Clytemnestra would perhaps not have stood so much alone.

And what of Hamlet himself as a mythical character? I find, almost to my surprise, exactly the evidence I should have liked to find. Hamlet in Saxo is the son of Horvendillus or Ørvandil, an ancient Teutonic god connected with Dawn and the Spring. His great toe, for instance, is now the Morning Star. (It was frozen off; that is why it shines like ice.) His wife was Groa, who is said to be the Green Earth; he slew his enemy Collerus—Kollr the Hooded or perhaps the Cold—in what Saxo calls 'a sweet and spring-green spot' in a budding wood. He was slain by his brother and avenged by his son. The sort of conclusion towards which I, on my different lines, was groping had already been drawn by several of the recognized Scandinavian authorities; notably by Professor Gollancz (who especially calls attention to the part played by the hero's mother), by Adolf Zinzow, and by Victor Rydberg. Professor Elton is more guarded, but points, on the whole, in the same direction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, Introduction; Zinzow, *Die Hamletsaga an und mit verwandten Sagen erläutert*, 1877; Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, Engl. tr. by Anderson, 1889; Elton, Appendix ii to his translation of Saxo, edited by York Powell. Rydberg goes so far as to identify Hamlet with Ørvandil's famous son Swipdag. 'Two Dissertations on the Hamlet of Saxo and of

Thus, if these arguments are trustworthy, we finally run the Hamlet-saga to earth in the same ground as the Orestes-saga; in that prehistoric and world-wide ritual battle of Summer and Winter, of Life and Death, which has played so vast a part in the mental development of the human race and especially, as Mr. E. K. Chambers has shown us, in the history of mediaeval drama. Hamlet also, like Orestes, has the notes of the Winter about him. Though he is on the side of right against wrong he is no joyous and triumphant slayer. He is clad in black, he rages alone, he is the bitter Fool who must slay the King.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV

It seems a strange thing, this gradual shaping and re-shaping of a primitive folk-tale, in itself rather empty and devoid of character, until it issues in a great tragedy which shakes the world. Yet in Greek literature, I am sure, the process is a common, almost a normal, one. Myth is defined by a Greek writer as *τὰ λεγόμενα ἐπὶ τοῖς δρωμένοις*, 'the things said over a ritual act'. For a certain agricultural rite, let us suppose, you tore a corn-sheaf in pieces and scattered the grain; and to explain why you did so you told a myth. There was once a young and beautiful Prince who was torn in pieces. . . . Was he torn by hounds or wild beasts in requital for some strange sin? Or was he utterly innocent, torn by mad Thracian women or devilish Titans, or the working of an unjust curse? As the group in the village talks together, and begins to muse and wonder and make unconscious poetry, the story gets better and stronger and ends by being the tragedy of Pentheus or Hippolytus or Actaeon or Dionysus himself. No doubt history comes in as well. Things happened in antiquity as much as now; and people were moved by them at the time and talked about them afterwards. But to observe exactly, and to remember and report exactly, is one of the very latest and rarest of human accomplishments. By the help of much written record and much mental training we can now manage it pretty well. But early man was at the time too excited to observe, and afterwards too indifferent to record, and always too much beset

*Shakespeare*' by R. G. Latham contain linguistic and mythological suggestions. I have not come across the works of Gubernatis mentioned in Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*, ii. p. 165.

<sup>1</sup> I believe this figure of the Fool to be capable of further analysis, but will not pursue the question here.

by fixed forms of thought ever to take in concrete facts exactly. (As a matter of fact he did not even wish to do so; he was aiming at something quite different.) In any case, the facts, as they happened, were thrown swiftly into the same crucible as the myths. Men did not research. They did not keep names and dates distinct. They talked together and wondered and followed their musings till an historical king of Ireland grew very like the old mythical Amlodi, an historical king of Mycenae took on part of the story of a primitive Ouranos or Sky-King wedded to an Earth-Mother. And in later times it was the myth that lived and grew great rather than the history. The things that thrill and amaze us in *Hamlet* or the *Agamemnon* are not any historical particulars about mediaeval Elsinore or prehistoric Mycenae, but things belonging to the old stories and the old magic rites, which stirred and thrilled our forefathers five and six thousand years ago; set them dancing all night on the hills, tearing beasts and men in pieces, and joyously giving up their own bodies to the most ghastly death, to keep the green world from dying and to be the saviours of their own people.

I am not trying to utter a paradox, nor even to formulate a theory. I am not for a moment questioning or belittling the existence or the overwhelming artistic value, of individual genius. I trust no one will suspect me of so doing. I am simply trying to understand a phenomenon which seems, before the days of the printed book and the widespread reading public, to have occurred quite normally and constantly in works of imaginative literature, and doubtless in some degree is occurring still.

What does our hypothesis imply? It seems to imply, first, a great unconscious solidarity and continuity, lasting from age to age, among all the Children of the Poets, both the Makers and the Callers-forth, both the artists and the audiences. In artistic creation, as in all the rest of life, the traditional element is far larger, the purely inventive element far smaller, than the unsophisticated man supposes.

Further, it implies that in the process of Tradition—that is, of being handed on from generation to generation, constantly modified and expurgated, re-felt and re-thought—a subject sometimes shows a curious power of almost eternal durability. It can be vastly altered; it may seem utterly transformed. Yet some inherent quality still remains, and significant details are repeated quite unconsciously by generation after generation of poets. Nay, more. It seems to show that there often is latent in some primitive



myth a wealth of detailed drama, waiting only for the dramatist of genius to discover it and draw it forth. Of course we must not exaggerate this point. We must not say that *Hamlet* or the *Electra* is latent in the original ritual as a flower is latent in the seed. The seed, if it just gets its food, is bound to develop along a certain fixed line; the myth or ritual is not. It depends for its development on too many live people and too many changing and complex conditions. We can only say that some natural line of growth is there, and in the case before us it seems to have asserted itself, both in large features and in fine details, in a rather extraordinary way. The two societies in which the Hamlet and Orestes tragedies arose were very dissimilar, the poets were quite different in character and quite independent, even the particular plays themselves differed greatly in plot and setting and technique and most other qualities; the only point of contact lies at their common origin many thousand years ago, and yet the fundamental identity still shows itself, almost unmistakable.

This conception may seem strange; but after all in the history of religion it is already a proven and accepted fact, this 'almost eternal durability' of primitive conceptions and even primitive rites. Our hypothesis will imply that what is already known to happen in religion may also occur in imaginative drama.

If this is so, it seems only natural that those subjects, or some of those subjects, which particularly stirred the interest of primitive men, should still have an appeal to certain very deep-rooted human instincts. I do not say that they will always move us now; but, when they do, they will tend to do so in ways which we recognize as particularly profound and poetical. This comes in part from their original quality; in part, I suspect, it depends on mere repetition. We all know the emotional charm possessed by famous and familiar words and names, even to hearers who do not understand the words and know little of the bearers of the names. I suspect that a charm of that sort lies in these stories and situations, which are—I cannot quite keep clear of metaphor—deeply implanted in the memory of the race, stamped, as it were, upon our physical organism. We have forgotten their faces and their voices; we say that they are strange to us. Yet there is something in us which leaps at the sight of them, a cry of the blood which tells us we have known them always.

Of course it is an essential part of the whole process of Tradition that the mythical material is constantly castigated and re-kindled by comparison with real life. That is where realism

comes in, and literary skill and imagination. An element drawn from real life was there, no doubt, even at the beginning. The earliest mythmaker never invented in a vacuum. He really tried—in Aristotle's famous phrase—to tell 'The Sort of Thing that Might Happen'; only his conception of 'What Might Happen' was, by our standards, a little wild. Then, as man's experience of life grew larger and calmer and more intimate, his conception of 'The Sort of Thing that Might Happen' grew more competent. It grew ever nearer to the truth of Nature, to its variety, to its reasonableness, to its infinite subtlety. And in the greatest ages of literature there seems to be, among other things, a power of preserving due proportion between these opposite elements—the expression of boundless primitive emotion and the subtle and delicate representation of life. In plays like *Hamlet* or the *Agamemnon* or the *Electra* we have certainly fine and flexible character-study, a varied and well-wrought story, a full command of the technical instruments of the poet and the dramatist; but we have also, I suspect, a strange unanalysed vibration below the surface, an undercurrent of desires and fears and passions, long slumbering yet eternally familiar, which have for thousands of years lain near the root of our most intimate emotions and been wrought into the fabric of our most magical dreams. How far into past ages this stream may reach back, I dare not even surmise; but it sometimes seems as if the power of stirring it or moving with it were one of the last secrets of genius.











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Murray, Gilbert, 1866-1957.

Hamlet and Orestes;





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